New Trends in Qualitative Research

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UNVEILING FACTORS INFLUENCING RESEARCH HESITANCY AND LIMITED RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT AMONG FILIPINO BEGINNING TEACHERS

ABSTRACT

This descriptive qualitative study explores factors contributing to research hesitancy and limited research engagement experienced by Filipino beginning teachers. By employing in-depth individual interviews and a virtual focus group discussion, the study gathered insights from 21 purposively selected beginning teachers. Participants were required to meet all inclusion criteria to be part of the study. Template analysis was used to interpret the data gathered. The participants highlighted poor research foundations, demanding work conditions, lack of mentoring, perceived lack of professional competence, and preoccupation with personal issues as factors contributing to their research hesitance and limited research engagement. A significant finding revealed that many beginning teachers are preoccupied with personal issues, which often hinder their ability to balance personal and professional responsibilities. This highlights the complex interplay between personal struggles and professional challenges that novice educators face, an underexplored area in research. Studying the topic qualitatively allowed for a deeper understanding of these various challenges, bringing to light personal and professional struggles that may not have been fully captured through quantitative methods alone, providing a more complete picture of the issue. Findings also suggest a need for targeted interventions, such as enhanced research instruction, structured mentoring systems, manageable teaching responsibilities, and in-service training, to empower and support beginning teachers in their research journey. This study has significant implications for teacher preparation programs and school administrators, aiming to foster a research-oriented culture and enhance research engagement among early-career educators. Further investigation into how personal issues affect research skills development could help design more effective support strategies.

Keywords
Beginning teachers; Limited research engagement; Hesitancy in research.

1. Introduction

In response to the growing demand for enhancing the professional growth of novice educators, universities have made transformative shifts in curriculum design and established specialized training facilities within education faculties. These initiatives are now common across conventional, comprehensive, and technology-driven institutions, offering tailored programs for teacher education and continuous professional development (Ono & Ferreira, 2010; Sachs, 2016; Makoa & Segalo, 2021). While research has emerged as a crucial tool for improving teaching practices, many new teachers struggle to embrace it due to the challenges of conducting research alongside their professional demands, despite its potential to enrich educational experiences.

As schools and educational institutions increasingly recognize the value of evidence-based practices, the expectations for teachers to engage in research have grown. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has issued a directive to all school heads, supervisors, and teachers to adopt the "Basic Education Research Agenda" (DepEd, 2016), which encourages the undertaking of educational research within the country.

The aim of this agenda is to address issues and challenges faced by teachers and the education department, and to propose solutions based on the research findings. Furthermore, conducting action research has been integrated into the annual performance appraisal of all teachers, as professional growth and development are essential components of individual teacher performance commitment and review (Ulla et al., 2017).

Beginning teachers, referred to as Career Stage 1 by the Department of Education, hold the required qualifications for entry into the teaching profession. During this stage, they receive support to progress to Career Stage 2 within a period of two to three years. Beginning teachers are often expected to contribute to the generation of knowledge, incorporating research findings into their classrooms and reflecting on their instructional approaches. However, despite the acknowledged benefits, many entry-level teachers grapple with various apprehensions that hinder their active participation in research activities (Morales, 2016).

This qualitative study aims to explore the underlying factors that contribute to research hesitancy and limited research engagement among beginning teachers in the Philippines. By examining their experiences, the study seeks to identify the perceived barriers that discourage these educators from engaging in research activities.

Understanding these obstacles is crucial to developing strategies that can promote a more research-oriented mindset and support early-career teachers in contributing to the educational research landscape.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research in Education

Research in the field of education boasts a well-established lineage, with a central focus on educators assuming dual roles as reflective practitioners and researchers within their own classroom environments.

As emphasized by Burns (2010), the tradition of educational research has long been entwined with the notions of "reflective practice" and the "educator as a researcher," with a fundamental objective of identifying and addressing issues within the context of classroom instruction. It is crucial to underscore that this approach does not imply any shortcomings on the part of educators; rather, it underscores their dedication to continual improvement. McNiff (2010) asserts that teachers engage in research to critically assess and enhance their teaching methods, aligning them with their desired educational outcomes. This undertaking not only enhances educators' instructional competencies but also significantly contributes to students' academic progress (Hine, 2013).

Additionally, research in the realm of education is closely intertwined with the ongoing professional development of teachers. Scholars like Stewart (2013) and West (2011) underscore that educators utilize research to experiment with innovative pedagogical approaches, evaluate instructional materials, and devise progressive curriculum designs. This practice equips teachers with invaluable research skills, bolsters their teaching confidence, and deepens their comprehension of subject matter and the dynamics of the classroom (Borg, 2014). Nevertheless, it is vital to acknowledge the existing challenges, including teachers' perceptions of time constraints and potential misalignment between research and their teaching obligations (Dehghan & Sahragard, 2015). Nevertheless, nurturing a culture of research within the field of education remains imperative for continuous enhancement and the achievement of superior educational outcomes, as illuminated by Grima-Farrell (2017).

2.2 Teachers' Engagement in Research

The literature on teachers' engagement in research presents a complex array of factors that influence their engagement. Historically, teachers have perceived research as the domain of education experts rather than as part of their own professional responsibilities. Darling-Hammond (1985) and Dehghan and Saragard (2015) point out that this misconception persists, with many teachers seeing their role as limited to applying existing research rather than conducting it. However, recent studies highlight that research engagement is increasingly linked to professional growth. Mehranirad (2023) found that teachers, particularly in Iran, are motivated by factors such as professional development, personal growth, organizational expectations, and pedagogical improvements.

Jamoom and Al-Omrani (2021) similarly note that university-level English teachers engage in research primarily for career advancement and skill enhancement, although time constraints, lack of resources, and insufficient motivation hinder sustained participation. These challenges are echoed in Lako and Mubita's (2021) study of Zambian geography teachers, where systemic barriers, including lack of administrative support and financial constraints, limit engagement.

Nelson and O'Beirne (2014) further emphasize that teachers often rely more on their own or colleagues' experiences than on academic research when making instructional decisions, attributing this trend to a combination of time pressures and insufficient research skills (Burns, 2010; McDonough, 2006). While Morales (2016) and Vec and Rupar (2015) highlight time limitations as a significant barrier, Glanz (2003) argues that many teachers perceive little direct benefit from engaging with research. Yet, Coldwell et al. (2017) suggest that schools fostering a positive research culture can encourage greater participation in evidence-based practices, despite persistent structural barriers. Furthermore, Nelson and O'Beirne (2014) found that primary teachers and senior leaders, particularly in lower-performing schools, tend to engage with research more actively than their more experienced or secondary-level counterparts, indicating the nuanced nature of research engagement across educational contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

This descriptive qualitative study delves into factors contributing to the hesitancy and limited engagement in research experienced by beginning teachers. Descriptive qualitative studies are particularly useful where understanding the detailed experiences and perspectives of individuals is crucial (Doyle et al., 2019). By adopting a qualitative lens, the research aims to achieve a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and concerns faced by novice educators in the context of educational research. Through in-depth exploration and analysis of participants' experiences, this study endeavors to shed light on the underlying factors that influence their engagement in research activities. The findings from this research will contribute valuable insights to support and empower beginning teachers in their research endeavors.

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study were purposively selected and specifically targeted Filipino beginning teachers. To be eligible for inclusion, the beginning teachers should have had less than three years of experience in teaching within the public basic education system, encompassing elementary, junior high school, and senior high school. Additionally, their willingness to participate in the study was a prerequisite for inclusion.

Furthermore, the beginning teachers should not have produced any research yet in the field of education. Based on the established criteria and adhering to the designated data collection methods, a total of 21 beginning teachers participated in this study.

3.3 Instrumentation and Data Collection

Individual face-to-face and virtual interviews were conducted as the primary data-gathering procedure. These interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide, allowing for focused discussions while permitting the emergence of individual perspectives. Sample questions for the semi-structured interviews included: "What specific barriers do you encounter when attempting to engage in research?" and “What role do you think your school's culture and environment play in either supporting or hindering your engagement in research activities?

A virtual Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was also conducted as part of the data gathering process, guided by key questions such as: "What institutional or systemic factors contribute to limited research engagement among teachers?" and "How do your experiences with professional development programs affect your willingness to engage in research?" An aide-memoire was provided to help participants recall the questions, and each session lasted at least 30 minutes, ensuring a thorough exploration of their insights. The FGD allowed participants to share perspectives and engage in dynamic discussions, revealing shared themes and collective insights that might not emerge in individual interviews. Conducted outside of working hours to respect participants' schedules, all data-gathering activities, including individual interviews, ensured confidentiality by excluding personal affiliations from the records. This structured, well-moderated FGD enriched the study by offering a deeper understanding of the hesitancy and challenges beginning teachers face in engaging with research (Mishra, 2016).

Furthermore, participants explicitly requested that their affiliation not be included in the data to prevent any potential identification. Respecting their wishes, the researcher took great care to ensure that all data were anonymized during the transcription and analysis process. This practice ensures that the study's findings are presented in an aggregated and de-identified manner, preserving the confidentiality and privacy of each participant.

It is important to note that the number of individual interviews conducted was determined by data saturation. Data saturation indicates the point at which new data no longer contributes significantly to the emerging themes and does not substantially alter the understanding of the research topic (Saunders et al., 2018).

3.4 Data Analysis

In this study, the data analysis strategy employed was Template Analysis, as outlined by King and Brooks (2016). Template Analysis is a method of thematically organizing and analyzing qualitative data, widely applied in various research areas within the social sciences.

Central to this approach is the development of a coding template that summarizes key themes identified by the researcher as significant within the data set, organizing them meaningfully. The analysis began with a comprehensive examination of the collected data, which allowed the researcher to immerse themselves in the depth and richness of participants' experiences.

This exploration led to the identification of key categories that emerged inductively from the qualitative data collected. The primary categories derived from the data included factors contributing to research hesitancy, which encapsulates themes related to barriers faced by beginning teachers in engaging with research, such as lack of foundational knowledge, demanding work conditions, insufficient mentorship, perceived professional competence, and personal challenges.

Another category reflects the measures to foster research engagement, capturing the recommendations made by participants to enhance their research engagement, including the need for mentorship opportunities, manageable workloads, in-service training sessions, participation in research-oriented workshops, and improved research instruction within undergraduate programs. A coding template was developed from an initial subset of data, capturing these significant themes and patterns. This template was then applied to additional data, allowing for continuous revision and refinement of the categories. This iterative process not only guided the interpretation of the data but also established a coherent framework for organizing the results.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

To ensure the quality of responses in this study, the researcher took several steps to establish a strong rapport with each participant before conducting the interviews. Prior to the interview, the researcher provided preliminary information about the study, including its purpose and objectives. The researcher also communicated the protocols in place to guarantee the confidentiality of data obtained from the interviews, ensuring that participants' responses would be treated with utmost privacy and discretion. Moreover, the researcher informed the participants about the use of pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity and that of their respective schools. Hence, names appearing in the discussion section are pseudonyms.

During the actual interview, a brief recapitulation of the confidentiality protocols was reiterated at the outset of each session. Furthermore, participants were asked to sign a copy of the letter of informed consent, demonstrating their voluntary agreement to participate in the study and their acknowledgment of the confidentiality measures in effect.

3.6 Trustworthiness

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of this study, a comprehensive approach was adopted following the recommendation by Yadav (2022).

Data triangulation was employed, utilizing both individual interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) as data sources to ensure a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the subject. Respondent validation was carried out to validate the accuracy of the gathered information. Moreover, data collection continued until data saturation was achieved, ensuring that all relevant aspects were thoroughly explored. To strengthen the findings, a peer review process was undertaken involving three independent experts in qualitative research, who provided critical feedback on the methodology, data interpretation, and overall coherence of the study. Additionally, an audit trail was maintained to document the research process.

4. Results and Discussion

Following a comprehensive analysis, two key discussion points have surfaced. These focal areas encompass the factors contributing to limited research engagement and proposed measures for empowering beginning teachers in their research endeavors.

4.1 Factors contributing to limited research engagement

The study participants provided insights into the reasons and factors that contribute to their hesitancy and limited engagement in research. These factors include poor foundation in research and research methodologies, demanding work conditions, lack of mentoring, perceived lack of professional competence, and preoccupation with personal issues.

4.1.1 Poor Foundation in Research and Research Methodologies

Respondents frequently expressed a lack of a solid foundation in research methodologies, noting a gap between university research courses and their practical application. Many felt that the knowledge gained in undergraduate research courses was insufficient to prepare them for research in their teaching careers. As beginning teachers enter the profession, their limited exposure to research becomes a significant barrier to producing high-quality research or engaging in it. The following participant remarks illustrate this concern:

> *"We had thesis courses back in college, but I think they did no prepare me enough. I could recall that guidance from the research teacher was inadequate that's why we just submitted and complied for the sake of completing course requirements. That I think is one major reason why I am having a difficult time understanding and engaging in research now that I am already teaching." (Teacher Leda, interview)*

> *I do not know much about research strategies and how to actually go about doing it on my own. That I think is the reason why right now I have zero research output yet. Also, we were in groups when we did research in college, so I did not have much involvement." (Teacher Hera, interview)*

Insufficient research knowledge is not confined to beginning teachers alone. Findings from the study conducted by Gomez and Catan (2021) reveal that even experienced teachers in public schools encounter similar challenges, resulting in limited research engagement. Similarly, higher education faculty members also echo the same sentiment, as reported in the study of Wa-Mbaleka's (2015). The existing literature underscores that a lack of comprehensive understanding in research and research methodologies is a prevailing issue among teachers, regardless of their experience level (Ellis & Loughland, 2016; Vásquez, 2017; Zhou, 2012).

4.1.2 Demanding Work Conditions

Participants commonly described their working conditions as "demanding," "heavy," and "hectic." These descriptions were supported by specific experiences such as being assigned multiple roles within the school simultaneously, grappling with an increased amount of paperwork, and being tasked with additional responsibilities by superiors. The time spent managing the classroom and fulfilling other obligations already takes up a significant portion of their time, leaving limited opportunities for other pursuits like research. Below are the responses along the lines of demanding work conditions.

> *"I don't have much time for research. I have so much to do and my schedule every day is so tight and hectic from doing classroom routines and juggling other designations. I could not say no since I am still new." (Teacher Zeus, FGD)*

In a study exploring the challenges faced by teacher-researchers, Ulla et al. (2017) highlighted that a significant hindrance to teachers' research engagement is their heavy workload. This finding was further supported by Zhou (2012), who arrived at a similar conclusion. Evidently, beginning teachers are burdened with additional assignments, some of which may not even directly align with their job descriptions, leading to a demanding working environment.

4.1.3 Lack of Mentoring

The data revealed a lack of mentorship from experienced teachers who are established researchers, with no structured mentoring system in schools. Participants expressed a strong desire for such a framework, believing it would ease their transition into the school system. A major barrier to effective mentoring is the heavy workload faced by teachers engaged in research. Additionally, some participants noted that few in the school community actively conduct research, as reflected in the response below.

> *"If only we were mentored since the beginning, I believe that my view about research could have changed. But unfortunately, there was no mentoring. We have a few teachers who have experience in doing action research but they are also bombarded with tasks." (Teacher Hera, Interview)*

According to Phillips et al. (2015), it is essential to offer mentorship to support the ongoing development and training of novice faculty members. By providing guidance, expertise, and constructive feedback, mentors can help early-career educators navigate the challenges and cultivate their research capabilities.

4.1.4 Perceived Lack of Professional Competence

Perceived lack of competence emerges as a significant challenge faced by beginning teachers. This apprehension stems from various sources, including the idea of being "new" to the field, limited exposure to research methodologies during teacher preparation, as well as the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the research process itself. This perceived inadequacy in research-related skills can hinder the confidence and motivation of beginning teachers, further impeding their active engagement in research. Addressing this concern is pivotal in empowering novice educators to develop the necessary skills and expertise, fostering a research-informed overall professional growth. One teacher participant expressed:

> *"Personally, I have this idea that I am not good enough because I am new and I have still many things to learn. I also have limited knowledge and exposure to research." (Teacher Ares, FGD)*

Beginning teachers often perceive their inexperience as a sign of insufficient capabilities, which affects their self-efficacy—a key factor in motivation (Yin et al., 2020). This reduced confidence in research skills further diminishes their motivation to engage in research activities. Although the perceived lack of competence in research among novice educators is critical, it remains underexplored in existing literature, highlighting the need for more research on how self-efficacy influences their professional development and engagement in research.

4.1.5 Preoccupation with Personal Issues

A significant factor contributing to beginning teachers' hesitancy in research is their preoccupation with personal issues. Even newly hired teachers often struggle to balance personal matters with their professional responsibilities. This highlights the complex interplay between personal and professional challenges faced by novice educators. Since this aspect remains underexplored in research, further investigation could offer valuable insights into how personal issues affect the development of research skills and help design targeted support strategies. The participant response below illustrates this concern.

> *"Like what I mentioned, I am assuming multiple roles in school and is expected still to be able to do my normal teaching tasks. What makes things worse, which I think is a reason why I also do not engage or is hesitant to engage in research is fact that I also have personal issues to sort." (Teacher Gaia, Interview)*

The statement also underscores the importance of schools and school leaders in recognizing the overall well-being of teachers. As beginning teachers navigate their professional journey, it is crucial for educational institutions to create an environment that fosters not only their academic growth but also their mental and emotional well-being.

4.2 Key measures to foster engagement in research

The data collected from beginning teachers revealed several key measures that schools can implement to enhance research productivity and engagement among beginning teachers. These measures are derived from the perspectives and insights of the very teachers who experience the challenges firsthand. These suggestions encompassed mentorship opportunities facilitated by seasoned faculty researchers, the allocation of manageable teaching responsibilities, the provision of in-service training sessions focused on research, participation in research-oriented workshops and conferences, and a notable emphasis on enhancing research instruction within undergraduate programs.

4.2.1 Mentorship opportunities facilitated by seasoned faculty researchers.

The establishment of mentorship programs, where experienced faculty researchers guide and support beginning teachers in their research, emerges as a promising avenue for empowerment. This claim finds support in literature as Li and Zhang, 2022 reported that mentorship practices significantly contribute to research productivity. This suggestion can be seen in the remarks below:

> *"Having a mentor who understood the research world and could guide me through the process was invaluable. It made me feel less alone and more capable." (Teacher Tartarus, Interview)*

> *"I learned so much from my mentor's feedback on my research proposal. It helped me refine my ideas and avoid potential pitfalls." (Teacher Nyx, FGD)*

It also worth noting that novice teachers value participating in the mentoring program because they perceive it as beneficial to their professional practice as an educator (Washington, 2022). Such mentorship programs can also foster a sense of community and belonging within the academic environment, encouraging sustained engagement with research.

4.2.2 Allocation of Manageable Teaching Responsibilities

Recognizing the heavy workload burden faced by beginning teachers, particularly the issue of overloading, it is imperative to allocate teaching responsibilities in a manner that allows for dedicated time and energy towards research pursuits. As reported by Macnamara (2020), excessive teaching loads are one of the many reasons why teachers quit or disengage from other productive tasks, significantly impacting their professional development. Furthermore, the study by Comon and Corpuz (2024) revealed that despite teachers being competent and engaged, their research work was often hindered by the numerous "coordinatorships" they handled. Overwhelmed by these demands, novice educators frequently find themselves with limited capacity to explore research opportunities. The statement below relates to the recommendation:

> *"When I first started teaching, I was juggling so many classes and responsibilities that research felt like an impossible dream. I think it's important for new teachers to have time to reflect on their practice and explore research questions. That's hard to do when you're constantly putting out fires." (Teacher Phoebe, Interview)*

By implementing workload management strategies and ensuring a reasonable teaching load, educational institutions can create a more conducive environment for research engagement. This, in turn, can lead to increased research output and contribute to the professional growth of beginning teachers.

4.2.3 Provision of in-service training sessions focused on research

In-service training sessions specifically designed to enhance research skills and knowledge can be invaluable resources for beginning teachers. These programs contribute to an increase in productivity, as noted by Uzorka (2024). By covering a wide range of topics, including research methodologies, data analysis techniques, research ethics, and dissemination strategies, these sessions equip novice educators with the necessary tools to engage in meaningful research. The following statement underscores the importance of implementing this proposed action:

> *"The workshop on action research really opened my eyes to how I could use research to improve my own classroom practice." (Teacher Theia, Interview)*

Ongoing professional development opportunities in schools can equip teachers with the tools and expertise needed to conduct meaningful research. This not only empowers them to contribute to the field of education but also enhances their overall teaching practices through a research-informed approach.

4.2.4 Participation in research-oriented workshops and conferences

Encouraging and facilitating teachers' participation in research-oriented workshops and conferences can expose them to the latest research findings, methodologies, and trends in their field.

This is supported by the findings of Hauss (2020) where workshops and conferences were known to constitute social spaces where researchers encounter other researchers, establish new contacts, maintain old contacts, hold exploratory talks, and initiate collaborations. These events provide a platform for networking with other researchers, sharing experiences, and gaining inspiration for their own research projects. The following comments from participants shed light on this issue.

> *"Attending that national education conference was a highlight of my year. I came back energized and full of new ideas to try in my classroom." (Teacher Leda, FGD)*

> *"I met so many amazing researchers at the workshop. It was a great opportunity to learn from their experiences and build my professional network." (Teacher Eros, Interview)*

Actively participating in workshops and conferences allow beginning teachers to broaden their horizons, expand their professional networks, and stay abreast of current developments in educational research. This exposure can spark new research ideas, foster collaboration, and ultimately lead to increased research engagement.

4.2.5 Enhancing research instruction within undergraduate programs

The foundation for research engagement is often laid during undergraduate studies. Therefore, it is essential to enhance research instruction within undergraduate programs to ensure that aspiring teachers are adequately prepared for the research demands of their future careers. This could involve revisiting and refining existing research courses, integrating research components into various subject areas, and providing opportunities for undergraduate students to engage in research projects under the guidance of faculty mentors. Participant expressed their perspectives on this issue as follows:

> *"If my undergraduate program had included more practical research experiences, I would have been much better prepared for the research expectations of my teaching career." (Teacher Aion, Interview)*

> *"I think all future teachers should have the opportunity to design and conduct their own research project. It's a truly empowering experience." (Teacher Phanes, Interview)*

These remarks highlight the need to revamp research instruction in undergraduate teacher programs by emphasizing hands-on research experiences. Integrating research into various subjects can foster a research-oriented mindset and bridge the gap between theory and real-world application.

5. Conclusion and Implication

This study has revealed a complex web of factors that contribute to the limited research engagement of beginning teachers.

These include inadequate foundational knowledge in research methodologies, the demanding nature of the teaching profession, a lack of mentorship, perceived lack of professional competence, and personal challenges. These interconnected barriers underscore the need for a comprehensive approach to address the issue.

Studying the topic qualitatively allowed for a deeper understanding of the various challenges faced by beginning teachers. The qualitative approach made it possible to capture the detailed experiences of the participants, offering valuable insights into not only the barriers but also the potential solutions. This methodology brought to light personal and professional struggles that may not have been fully captured through quantitative methods alone, providing a more complete picture of the issue.

The voices of the participants themselves offer valuable insights into potential solutions. Establishing mentorship programs with seasoned researchers can foster confidence and build research capacity. Allocating manageable teaching loads allows beginning teachers to dedicate time and energy to research pursuits. Providing in-service training sessions on research methodologies, data analysis, and dissemination strategies equips teachers with the necessary tools for meaningful research. Encouraging participation in research-oriented workshops and conferences expands professional networks and exposes teachers to the latest research trends. Finally, enhancing research instruction within undergraduate programs can lay a strong foundation for lifelong research engagement.

The findings emphasize the need for coordinated efforts across the education sector. Teacher education programs should integrate practical research into their curricula, while administrators and policymakers must create supportive environments with manageable workloads and dedicated research resources. Experienced teachers play a crucial role as mentors, guiding new educators and fostering their growth. For beginning teachers, this research highlights the importance of self-advocacy and actively seeking professional development opportunities in research, ensuring they contribute meaningfully to the field.

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